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ABSTRACT

The term "cooperative and mutual enterprises" (CMEs) was developed in 1999 by a mutuality task force in Oxfordshire, England, as a modern way of reasserting the notion of the adult education movement as a cooperative movement for social (democratic) inclusion. CMEs recall the tradition of learning through clubs, unions, mechanics' institutes, and evening classes. The tradition was epitomized in mutual improvement societies. The structures in the Learning and Skills Council "Prospectus" and in the Learning and Skills Act have hardened since the arrangements proposed in the policy paper "Learning to Succeed" and now run the risk of being so top-down that they will necessitate arrangements that are more cooperative and more mutual. The term "organic learning" has been developed as a label for what cooperative and mutual enterprise could do for and with the new structures proposed for adult and lifelong learning. The term is intended to contest the separation between learning and "real life" and to connect with the term "organic intellectuals" that was favored by 1970s new social movements and new cooperators. Eighteen specific proposals for action by policymakers were proposed to meet the increased demand for organic learning opportunities described by such familiar terms as informal, flexible, learner-driven, vocational, lifelong, accountable, and partnership. (MN)

ORGANIC LEARNING

Mutual enterprise and the Learning and Skills agenda



Stephen Yeo

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NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION
FOR ADULT LEARNING

Policy Discussion Paper

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ORGANIC LEARNING

**Mutual enterprise and the
Learning and Skills agenda**

Stephen Yeo

Published by the National Institute of
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NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a
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Social inclusion still drives the lifelong learning agenda, and vice versa. The Consultation on the Policy Action Team *Neighbourhood Renewal* Reports was important for co-operation, mutuality, and lifelong learning: beyond the PAT remit for the worst housing estates. At a time when hopes and fears for the outcomes of the government's Learning and Skills agenda are equally plausible, co-operation and mutuality – or 'devolved', 'integrated', 'community-based' activity – could help to prevent a centrist, elitist education and training agenda from re-emerging.

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Definitions of CMEs which open out their ideas and practice, making them available to contribute to the Learning Age, and – the other way round – opening CMEs so that they may be informed by the Learning and Skills Agenda. The democratic deficit and CMEs.

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The 'great tradition' of learning in Britain was named by David Blunkett in *The Learning Age* (1998) as learning through 'clubs, unions, mechanics' institutes, evening classes and so on'. The great tradition can be epitomised in Mutual Improvement Societies. It remains as a resource for achieving the *scale* of the transformation New Labour has wanted to achieve in all-age education and training during the three years since May 1997. Learning Centres need not be a new name for existing provision. They could be inspired by the simplicity of Mutual Improvement Societies. To become more of a resource, the great tradition needs specifying further.

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The structures in the Learning and Skills Council *Prospectus* and in the Learning and Skills Act have hardened since the 'arrangements' proposed in *Learning to Succeed*. The structures run the risk of being so top-down that they will *necessitate* arrangements which are more co-operative and mutual, more 'organic'. Such a possibility was alluded to in *Learning to Succeed*, when that document discussed the evolving relationship between Local (previously Lifelong) Learning Partnerships and Local Learning and Skills Councils.

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The word 'organic' is developed here as a label for what co-operative and mutual enterprise could do for, and with, the new structures. The value that 'organic' is intended to add is, first, to contest the separation between learning and 'real' life and work. Secondly, it connects with a term favoured by 1970s new social movements and new co-operators: namely the term 'organic intellectuals'. Without being bold enough to acknowledge the 1970s, the PAT Reports, for instance, and social inclusion as more than a moral stance, may not be able to 'deliver'.

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Familiar phrases which surround the Learning and Skills agenda like: 'informal', 'flexible', 'learner-driven', 'for work', 'vocational', 'lifelong', 'accountable', 'when and where you want it', 'learning centre', 'information and communications technology', 'partnership', and 'new entrants' could open up specific opportunities for organic learning. Or they could turn out to be dreadful: they could describe individualised, cheap, incoherent, centralised, 'mass' (in the worst sense), private, unsupported, just-in-time, episodic, commodified, passive learning.	
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The Oxfordshire Mutuality Task Force Report, <i>Mutuality Works</i> ; a Single Regeneration Budget 6 bid to the South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA) which will include a Learning and Skills post; the Co-operative Commission with its extended remit, beyond the retail Co-operative Movement; and co-operative support agencies + Regional Co-operative Councils, such as Social Enterprise London, offer ways of addressing the agenda proposed above.	
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The argument

Deep in the adult education movement in Britain, there has been commitment to democratic citizenship, combined with creativity concerning organisational forms. Equally deep in Britain, there is a rich inheritance of co-operation and mutuality. This is most obvious in the Co-operative Movement itself. Co-operative Societies cannot be separated from Friendly Societies, Clubs, Building Societies and Unions of many kinds including Trades Unions. Nor can they be separated from educational associations, such as the WEA. The link between Albert Mansbridge as a WEA founder, a founder of an international body for adult learning which fed directly into NIACE, a Co-operative Wholesale Society worker, and a Building Society enthusiast is the most obvious symbol of a common movement. The label Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises (CMEs) was developed during 1999 by a Mutuality Task Force in Oxfordshire, as a modern way of reasserting such commonality.

Such an enterprising movement is of great practical, modern interest. Its ideas and progeny are more relevant to policy formation and contemporary application in the early twenty-first century political climate than they have been for decades. Nowhere could this be more true than in the case of lifelong learning. There is space between dominant ideas of the private and dominant ideas of the public in education and training, as elsewhere, which CMEs can enlarge. Co-operatives and Mutuals can use this space to grow, organically. It was appropriate that there should be a large picture of the Rochdale Pioneers in Richard Rodgers' Millenium Dome, not far from the Learning Zone. The Pioneers ran a flourishing members' education programme some years before statute (Industrial and Provident Society legislation) sanctioned it. When considering the 're-branding' of Britain, it was right that the think tank Demos should have referred to Britain as 'the silent revolutionary, constantly inventing new forms of organisation and new ways of running society'. This NIACE Policy Discussion Paper connects the new arrangements for post-16 learning in the Learning and Skills Act, with Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises' renewed sense of their own ambition, as silent revolutionaries.

Introduction

- The *aim* of this paper is to contribute to policy and practice in two areas: lifelong learning, on the one hand, and co-operation and mutuality on the other.
- The *context* of the paper is the Learning and Skills Act, whose arrangements will come into force in April 2001, and the Labour Party/Co-operative movement Co-operative Commission which will report to Co-operative Congress in May 2001.
- The *argument* of the paper is that **the new Learning and Skills agenda plus Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise equals organic learning.**
- The *contents* of the paper describe what is meant by 'organic learning' and, on the way, what is meant by Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise. The phrase 'organic learning' will be used to capture the most positive possibilities of the new learning agenda, particularly those which could best be realised through co-operation and mutuality.
- The *objective* of the paper is to add value to the arrangements for learning and skills contained in the Learning and Skills Act, and to add value to the work of the Co-operative Commission, by connecting them. Connections will be made conceptually, by means of ideas and approaches. Connections will also be made through proposals for action.
- The *method* of the paper will be to blend an historical analysis of mutuality with policy issues. The paper argues in distinct sections, each with its own heading. Ideas and approaches are in the early sections of the paper. Proposals for action come in the final sections of the paper. People mainly interested in **Recommendations** should go straight to page 25.

**The new Learning and Skills agenda +
Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise =
ORGANIC LEARNING**

A moment for democratic inclusion

In a recent *New Times* editorial, Kevin Davey wrote that New Labour's new Britain will either be more democratic or it will be dreadful. He was writing about devolution. The judgement applies with equal force to the skills, skills, skills agenda, reinvigorated as it has been by the Prime Minister's commitment to 'education, education, education'.

Devolution and lifelong learning

Devolution is on the Learning and Skills agenda too, and not only in the sense that arrangements are already different in different parts of the UK. Devolution is perhaps an upside-down word in the context of learning and skills. Who devolves to whom? It is from the activity of people (us) getting together to produce the necessities of life from which twenty-first century power – including government – derives, not the other way round. In the twenty-first century, the necessities of life cannot be separated from learning and skills. Charles Leadbeater's *Living on Thin Air: the New Economy* (1999) brought this home. The old slogan 'Knowledge is power', used by nineteenth century working-class movements, is now manifestly true: and Power is knowledge. Knowledge is difficult to enclose. It does not yield full value – in modern forms of production – if it is privatised. It is necessarily and materially ours as well as theirs: otherwise theirs does not work so well. Who depends on whom? From a democratic point of view, we devolve, lend, or share the power of our learning and skills to *them*. By 'them' is meant those who normally see themselves as 'devolving' government. We thereby attempt to dissolve the third person pronoun 'them' into a broader notion of 'us'. This is one way of describing the learning (up-skilling, not de-skilling) process.

The present moment is an important one for learning and skills. They are perceived, to an unusual extent, as materially productive; as economic as well as social; as part of the bottom line rather than as overhead; in older Marxist terminology as basic rather than as superstructural. This is a change of perception as much for the New Right of the 1980s as for the Old Left of the 1970s. The new perception puts learning and skills centre stage. This is why the learning agenda is widely shared, across political parties. It is now uncommon to advocate the best in education for the few rather than for the many. It does not need saying that this has not generally been the case in Britain, particularly in England. And it may not be the case for long.

Since 1997 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools has been in a minority. As Chris Woodhead prepares to extend his Ofsted remit to 16 to 19 year-olds, following the implementation of the Learning and Skills Act in April 2001, his views on lifelong learning as 'a utopian ideal' have the capacity to shock. He offered them in a lecture at the RSA in February 2000. They were shocking because of a general climate of inclusion which surrounds lifelong learning. Chris Woodhead is sensitive to this climate. He acknowledges 'the total cultural

transformation that the dream of the learning age encapsulates'. But he does not like it. Nor, he finds, did Michael Oakeshott and DH Lawrence. 'We must not forget,' said Chris Woodhead, 'that the world cannot and will not be transformed'.

To hold 'the world' constant in this way, at a time when the world *is being* transformed in ways unparalleled in human history, is not, perhaps, an ideal learning position.

The climate of inclusion has been reinforced recently, for instance, by the work of the Social Exclusion Unit and its Policy Action Teams. These teams have now made over 600 recommendations. They were set up by the Prime Minister 'to develop integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates'. They have more general implications. These have been realised within the Co-operative Movement. The July 2000 Annual Industrial Common Ownership Movement/Foundation (ICOM/ICOF) conference focussed on social inclusion and democratic participation, taking the PAT reports as a guiding structure. This key Co-operative Movement event will include a strand on Education and Skills. The National Co-operative Education Association's annual Convention in April 2000, less surprisingly, also focussed on the Learning and Skills Bill. This was reflected in *Co-operative News*.

Learning and Skills are central to many of the PAT recommendations. Co-operation and mutuality, in different words ('joining up', 'community capacity building', 'social capital', 'an integrated approach') is central to all of them. There has been a fruitful consultation period on the Social Exclusion Unit's overall *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Framework Version for Consultation*. It was important that responses came in from a wide, joined-up or 'social' field, rather than a narrow, technical, or 'policy' field. *Policy* itself is now being integrated more fully with *process*. Within the new politics, policy development and implementation have themselves become much more clearly a co-operative and mutual process, rather than 'roll-out' from above.

The PAT report on *Skills for Neighbourhood Renewal: Local Solutions (1999)* is particularly helpful to lifelong learning and to possible openings to co-operation and mutuality in this field. A NIACE Briefing on *Neighbourhood Renewal and Adult Learning* (April 2000) summarised the *failings* of the existing education and training system and the *remedies* identified by this particular Policy Action Team in helpful, tabular form.

To anyone active in 'the community' during the 1970s, the findings will be familiar, with the happy difference that older Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises (definitions on page 5) are now alive to the failings of the education, training and other systems, to the remedies, *and* to their own possible contribution to both. The Co-operative Wholesale Society published a report on *Social Inclusion* in 1998. The Portman Building Society now uses member focus groups for two-way learning. The Association of Friendly Societies has an active training programme. The Communication Workers Friendly Society is developing learning

modules for its own and other Friendly Society members. The Club and Institute Union has always had learning as one of its principal (and funded) objects, regularly running schools for members and sending students to Ruskin College. During the 1970s, it tended to be the 'new social movements' – worker co-ops, the women's movement, community organisations, ethnic minority initiatives – alongside Home Office Community Development Projects – which shared diagnoses like those of the current Policy Action Team. Now, older Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises are stirring, *within* their own forms of enterprise/association as well as *between* those forms and others. One of the most hopeful signs of the times is the manifest capacity of 'old mutuality' to learn.

Glossing the NIACE summary of the Policy Action Team's remedies in order to make the openings to co-operative and mutual enterprise apparent, they include:

- ☐ neighbourhood learning centres which do not simply reproduce or extend dominant provision.
- ☐ community-based learning.
- ☐ recognition of the familial, friendly, co-operative, working-in-unison, public and private forms for learning which people use. These appear as 'informal' to orthodox providers of education and training, though they always take specific forms.
- ☐ local champions acting with users. (The DfEE has a particular commitment to Community Champions, and has worked with the Oxfordshire Council for Voluntary Action and Ruskin College on a pilot for these).
- ☐ community-leadership programmes designed to generate confidence and capacity among potential champions to initiate, promote and lead.
- ☐ digging where we stand, in the workshop (e.g. History Workshop) tradition of recognising people's starting points.
- ☐ involvement of local people in management and delivery (consumers becoming users becoming members).
- ☐ voluntary, community-based, sometimes small organisations or Societies as 'providers' in the sense of being open to public funding, e.g. from the Learning and Skills Council.
- ☐ targets, but set by Local Learning Partnerships in consultation with local people to meet local needs, and expressed not only in terms of hard outputs. Targets could include community, or more-than-individual, outcomes: including changed, community, more social, relations.

Street in Policy Action Teams since 1997, should not be punctured. Whatever can be done to reinforce it, should be done. This is why it is worth looking again at the nature of Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise, and linking it to the new learning and skills agenda. Otherwise, an elitist, deeply undemocratic, and characteristically English idea of education as social differentiation, and a narrow idea of 'standards' which goes with that, will once again break through, from above. Things are delicately balanced at the moment. Hopes and fears are equally plausible, registered equally, for instance, on the editorial barometer of *Adults Learning*.

Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises

Mutual *organisations* are brought together by and for their members. They grow, at best, organically, from their (our) needs and desires. They can be brought together to meet many fundamental human needs. These needs are for food, drink, sociability, entertainment, sharing risks, acquiring shelter and so on. Such fundamental needs in the 21st century will undoubtedly include learning and the acquisition – and sharing – of skills.

Mutuality as an *idea* has revived of late. This has been partly the result of the threat of privatisation, from an *economic* point of view. But it has also been the result of the threat, from a *social* point of view, of the private in another sense. Absence of belonging, low participation rates, self-exclusion, are seen as a threat, as well as a loss of opportunity and a waste of human potential. This is by people who want to create an 'us' society – and hence a more productive economy – rather than one based upon me, me, me. Learning and skills are seen not only as a component of this opportunity/threat, but as key to it: Key Skills. It is not accidental that the first set of National Education and Training Targets were developed and 'owned' by the CBI and TUC before they were adopted by the then Government. And that their 'Aim' included a deeply CME way of expressing values: self-reliance, flexibility and breadth. As a TEC Director while Principal of Ruskin, I found this Aim to be an excellent peg on which to hang a new learning agenda, to work in parallel with the Heart of England Training and Enterprise Council's New Business Agenda.

The idea of mutuality has also come to serve as a critical handle on 'mutual' organisations. 'How much mutuality is there?' has become an active question. The question is not only put to 'the community' in general, but also by mutual organisations to themselves. It is also, of course, a matter for interrogation of mutual organisations by external, and sometimes predatory, private companies. Subscribers to Co-op Net will be familiar with the fruitful combination of collective self-criticism and awareness of external threat which is the life-blood of that electronic network: organising against the de-mutualisation of giant Mutual Insurers such as Standard Life and Friends Provident, yes. But how mutual, how co-operative are they anyway? What can we do to make them more so?

Mutuals are co-operatively owned, at best managed and controlled in common. At best they *constitute* democracies – in themselves – rather than being part of the division of labour between 'politics' (where formal, or representative, democracy is expected to operate) and 'work', 'business', 'leisure', 'education', 'training', and so on. (where it is not expected to operate). Mutuals attempt to heal divisions of labour between politics and the rest of life. Historically, they have favoured delegate democracy rather than the professionalisation and specialisation of representation in representative democracy. One way of defining mutuals, indeed, is as organisations which contest divisions of labour which solidify as divisions of *humans*, for example between those who 'do politics' and those who don't, or those who learn and those who don't. Mutuals have seen such divisions as based upon competition and leading to a society based upon class. Instead, mutuals attempt to construct divisions of labour as divisions of (sharing

of) work. Mutuals see those divisions as based upon co-operation and leading to Societies, and thence to a society worthy of the word. 'And so at last, we shall have a society in which the free development of each is a precondition for the free development of all . . .'

The *idea* of democracy and self-management are as important as any other 'product' in a mutual. This is true of the culture of their own enterprises, rather than alienated to 'representative' institutions. It is reflected in old-fashioned words like fellowship, association, getting together, and newer words such as 'sustainable' and 'organic'.

This is what democracy means to CMEs. This is so, no matter whether the *practice* has always gone that way. Practice has been less than perfect, for instance in giant Building Societies, Mutual Insurance companies and retail grocery chains. Their reach, like all great human endeavours, has been beyond their grasp. This is why they have become vulnerable to privatisation. Nevertheless, it is 'co-operation', a 'friendly society', and 'union' which the Co-op, Affiliated Orders of Friendly Society, and Trade Unions deliver, as much as tea, insurance and wages.

This is very modern indeed: the brand as the product, the product as a quality of relationship – what cutting edge private companies know as their 'equity' statement, and equity advertising. The conditions of work for which these giant categories of CMEs stand, include co-operation, association (friendliness), and union. 'We have resolved', as a Co-operator once put it, 'to constitute the society for which we work'. Their own federal organisations, like Co-operative Congress or the TUC, have themselves been seen as 'parliaments', as important, to them, as Parliament with its capital P.

A constant watch on Executive power has been kept by the members of CMEs. Historically, this has been so strong that it has crippled forward action by some of them. The Annual Report of the Club and Institute Union for 1999 said that 'another problem facing the Union is the lack of enthusiasm for decisions made by the Union Executive in the interests of clubs and the Union. Seven out of the eight motions proposed at the Union's conference were defeated and although not all were proposed by the Union Executive Committee, it is nevertheless a major factor that almost every idea for change seems as if is due for defeat before the debate takes place at our annual conference.' Chief Executives know the feeling! But equally, elaborate democratic structures have been major cultural creations in Britain – and major sites for lifelong learning for generations of people. They were pioneered in 'the voluntary sector', particularly among working people's CMEs. To throw such cultural achievements and learning opportunities away as 'old', at a time when Executive power at national and international governmental level is becoming arrogant and manipulative as never before, would be wasteful indeed. Some re-cycling is needed, without doubt, but dumping would be dangerous.

In CMEs, members get together to meet common needs and to provide shared

services, from which all benefit. Different social relations are the intended, and to a greater or lesser extent, the actual result. Or, as Leadbeater and Christie put it: 'A mutual organisation is owned by its members, who also have a say – usually a vote – in the corporate governance of the organisation. The distinguishing feature of a mutual is that the member-owners are more than investors. They usually have another relationship with the mutual, either as consumers, producers or suppliers. The members create and own the organisation either to consume its services or to come together as joint-producers'. (Charles Leadbeater and Ian Christie, *To our Mutual Advantage*, Demos 1999)

Having a say, 'usually a vote', creating and owning the organisation, coming together as joint producers, constituting democracies in and of themselves... may be particularly important now, at a time when a 'democratic deficit' has been recognised in the culture at large.

This democratic deficit has been accumulating in a number of ways, many of them evident in the new structures for Learning and Skills:

- Regional Government (Regional Development Agencies/ Government Offices, and Voluntary Assemblies/Chambers) is, so far entirely undemocratic outside Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London. (The jury is out as to whether elected Mayors will make the deficit worse, in very old Caesarist ways, or help to correct it).
- Local Government has been steadily reduced in power, effectiveness, and access to its own revenue base. Its future role, and that of Local Education Authorities, is uncertain. There are those in Local Government who point to its supplementation (replacement?) by mutual forms: Development Trusts; public-private, private-public partnerships of many kinds; and service co-operatives, for care, leisure, housing, utilities and so on.
- Big spending, arms' length, government appointed, public bodies (Non-Departmental Public Bodies or NDPBs) have multiplied. The Learning and Skills Council will be one of the largest of these. Institutional relations with these bodies (e.g. from former FEFC Colleges), and individual citizen (e.g. learner) relations where those exist, are those of purchaser and provider. They are also those of quality assurer, whistle-blower, and so on, but *not* those of representative, and still less of delegate. 'Interests' (an eighteenth century, pre-democratic notion) may be represented on these NDPBs, but by consultation, appointment, selection, ... not by election.
- Parliamentary institutions and the electoral system, although modified at the edges, remain largely archaic. Representative

democracy in its inherited forms can no longer rely *either* on the enthusiastic participation of the majority of citizens, *or* on reverence shown by governments. Reverence for representative democracy in its inherited forms is only shown by government and the executive when they are threatened by people who address the democratic deficit by 'going beyond the ballot box', or by 'riot' – another eighteenth century notion.

- Popular (as well as Executive) cynicism about representative democracy grows. The 'contract' between citizen and government becomes less and less social (values and principles) and increasingly commercial (packages, pledges, targets, delivery systems, and so on). Values and principles tend to get dismissed as 'ideology', not worth talking about unless they 'deliver'. We ain't seen half the electoral fickleness yet, as voting has less and less to do with values and principles, and more and more to do with maximising individual advantage within a political market place. The market place has been constructed as such not by popular demand in the first instance but by supply, by Party Leaders as Chief Executives and their machines. That is what *they* want, not what *we*, in the first instance asked for.

So, what is to be done? To say that there is an opportunity for CMEs to do exactly what their inheritance stands for, namely to associate organically around, and to find ways for everyone to belong to, the provision of necessary goods and services themselves, is to understate the case. There is a crying *need* for that to happen, for instance through lifelong learning.

At a more humdrum level, finding ways of reducing the democratic deficit may help the new structures for Learning and Skills to work better *with*, rather than at a distance from, 'the community' in general and, more important, with actual communities. A reduction of the democratic deficit may assist what the PAT3 report called for – 'the development of delivery channels that are trusted by deprived communities'. Such entities, however, when they work, will not best be described as 'delivery channels'.

Hence the interest in Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise. Hence the interest in the potential extension of such enterprise into lifelong learning for the learning age.

The 'great tradition', including everyone

David Blunkett's view of standards remains his own. Not an elitist, he starts from his commitment to what he named as 'the great tradition' in British education, built from below, very often by means of co-operative and mutual enterprise.

This tradition goes back to the 1790s, when a Society of working people in London (the London Corresponding Society) began to correspond with a similar Society in David Blunkett's city of Sheffield. It may be important that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment came to office with a Sheffield labour movement, local government, adult education and FE background. He knows a great deal about his great tradition. He is imbued with civic and working-class, collective self-help values, like no future Secretary of State is likely to be.

Thomas Hardy, shoemaker, Secretary and Treasurer of the London Corresponding Society, informed the Society's Sheffield associates that, in London, they had resolved that 'the number of our members be unlimited'. This was the first of their 'leading rules'.

'Today,' as EP Thompson wrote in the opening pages of his classic *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) – itself a product of the adult education movement – 'we might pass over such a rule as a commonplace: and yet it is one of the hinges upon which history turns. It signified the end to any notion of exclusiveness'. As we might put it today, it announced social inclusion in the active tense. "We will include ourselves", not "they will be included" – leading with the first person plural as subject (we, us) rather than with the third person plural as object (they, them). 'To throw open the doors ... in this "unlimited" way,' EP Thompson continued, 'implied a new notion of democracy, which cast aside ancient inhibitions and trusted to self-activating and self-organizing processes among the common people'.

Such a notion ran deep in adult learning for the next two hundred years: 'educate, agitate, organise'. Throughout this time there has been a more or less intense, more or less active culture of voluntary activity and social movements. This led to the growth of friendly societies, co-operatives, trade unions, libraries and a range of associations and institutions of adult learning. These are the nineteenth-century soil in which later Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise has grown. Overwhelmingly male during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, with important exceptions such as the Women's Co-operative Guild and some Friendly Societies and Unions, there was nothing in their organisational forms (though much in their practice) which determined that they should be such. Users and learners were motivated as founders, organisers and managers of their own learning. Successive swathes of local and central state delivery created a different dynamic during the twentieth century. During recent decades the tradition has been under crippling pressure. But the older impulse is by no means spent. It is what moves or motivates many people now, for instance in NIACE, or in public/private, private/public services: constituting a social movement, all age, both genders, and with no exclusions.

In *The Learning Age* (1998), David Blunkett named this tradition as learning through 'clubs, unions, mechanics' institutes, evening classes, and so on'. Mutual Improvement Societies, a generic form of co-operation and mutuality in the mid-nineteenth century, were at the core of such learning. They are curiously modern in flavour.

David Blunkett's great tradition

The tradition is epitomised in a book published in 1851 whose title page eliminates the need for any other text, JW Hudson's *The History of Adult Education, in which is comprised a full and complete history of the Mechanics' and Literary Institutions, Athenaeums, Philosophical, Mental and Christian Improvement Societies, Literary Unions, Schools of Design, etc, of Great Britain, Ireland, America, etc, etc. By JW Hudson, Ph.D, Secretary of the Manchester Athenaeum, Founder of the Scottish and Northern Unions of Literary and Mechanics' Institutions.*

The text is also worth reading:

p.93. 'THE LEEDS ODDFELLOWS INSTITUTION has been attended by one-hundred and forty-seven members in each of the last two years, including nineteen females. It possesses a library of one thousand two hundred volumes, issuing nine thousand eight hundred and seventy-six volumes in the year. Thirty lectures were delivered last year. Its evening classes afforded instruction to fifty members, and its reading room to a greater number. The subscription is fixed at one shilling per quarter for Oddfellows, and one shilling and sixpence per quarter to other persons.'

p.187. 'Literary, Mechanics' and other adult educational societies are constituted on self-governing principles, and they recognise, as a general rule, no other authority than their own selected administration... The attempts to form a central Union have always been restrained by a judicious caution... Any external interference, such as government visitation, would be universally viewed as a disturbance and encroachment upon those rights which form the rock upon which these Institutions are based.

Should a great central Union be carried out under government auspices, it must, to succeed even for a brief period, be based upon such regulations as will effectually disarm the just suspicions of the advocates of voluntary education, and subdue those glowing anticipations of extraneous aid in the shape of golden grants which the mere name of an educational minister of state and a national board cannot fail to excite. On the whole, then, the experience of the past is proof of the instability of extreme centralization.'

AE Dobbs was another committed writer, in *Education and Social*

Movement (1919). Dobbs saw Mutual Improvement Societies as 'one of the most characteristic aspects of voluntary enterprise'.

pp. 171-2. 'The plan was exceedingly simple, and might be easily adapted to varying needs. The members arranged to meet at each other's houses, or hired a room for the purpose, accumulating meanwhile a small supply of books and stationary. They would proceed to lay down a few simple rules, to appoint teachers, and to arrange a programme of classes, essay readings and discussions. Such Societies were constantly springing up ...'

Forms like Mutual Improvement Societies will be revived, in one form or another (as learning centres), at a time when old associational forms – collective self-help and voluntary action – seem like a 'really useful' inheritance for twenty-first century Britain. They *have been* revived, under different names and in different cultures in Britain and elsewhere, often among 'communities of belief', or 'faith communities'. There are all kinds of nexus's of belonging in the interstices of the dominant culture now which put a high premium on shared learning. Such communities of interest provide exemplary *motivation* to learn for their members, at a time when in the 'wider community' it is often perceived that 'lack of motivation' is the main barrier to a learning age. Professor Michael Young at the Institute of Education has worked on this.

To be more specific:

- Mainstream co-operative and mutual forms inherited from the nineteenth century and active in the twenty-first century include: Co-ops, Friendly Societies, Clubs, Building Societies, Educational Associations (like the WEA) and Trade Unions. All of these have had, or still have, strong adult learning commitments. Such commitments have been internal (member education, member relations) and, to a lesser extent, outward-facing (general learning for members, and member education for potential members). As a set of related social movements, these enduring forms have been central to the narrative of Britain as 'the silent revolutionary, constantly inventing new forms of organisation and new ways of running society'. This was one of the six narratives proposed by Mark Leonard of Demos for the 're-branding of Britain'.
- Twentieth-century descendants of these enterprises include Credit Unions, whose large-scale development in Ireland since the 1950s was integrally connected to adult education; Local Economic and Trading Schemes (LETS), which occasionally include teaching/learning as 'currency', alongside other local goods; Mutual Loan Guarantee Societies (of great potential for the Small Business Service); business co-ops,

agricultural co-ops, housing co-ops, leisure co-ops, communications co-ops; Pre-School Play Groups and After-School Clubs.

- Twenty-first century growth from these roots could include many more forms of co-operation and mutuality in the field of lifelong learning than currently exist. The Trade Union Learning Fund and the Adult and Community Learning Fund have been successful in encouraging such growth. Recent writers on co-operation and mutuality in Britain from the outside, have pointed out that education and training provide a rich and relatively underdeveloped field for Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises to develop. Such writers include Charlie Leadbeater and Ian Christie, *To Our Mutual Advantage*, (Demos 1999); Ian Hargreaves, *Co-operation and the Co-operative Movement*, (New Mutualism pamphlet series 1998); and Neil Macintosh of CfBT in forthcoming work from IPPR on the 'private' in education. During the first half of the year 2000, subscribers to Co-op Net have been searching actively for Learning Co-ops, confident that such forms exist in embryo and will take their formal place, replacing 'providers' or, as they are now known, 'suppliers' in the ecology of learning and teaching.

Learning and Skills as a Mutual Enterprise

Mick Fletcher, Development Adviser, Funding Learning, FEDA, '*Learning and Skills as a Mutual Enterprise*' in Caroline Mager, Peter Robinson *et al*, *The New Learning Market* (IPPR/FEDA, 2000), wrote that:

"There are grounds for suggesting that the "mutual" approach might be particularly appropriate for aspects of education and training'. The basis of a mutual approach is that we can engage with the world of production and distribution as citizens rather than just as consumers. We can choose to do more than seek our own immediate advantage. It may make sense for us to approach the education market in this way'.

Fletcher lists four main strengths of mutual organisation in general which might be transferable to learning: the efficiency of high trust; the encouragement for participants to identify the implications of their actions for people other than themselves; the generation of higher levels of commitment; and the management of the special circumstances of co-production where the output is produced by the customer.

To have *this* whole tradition named as great by a Secretary of State was exciting. The 'great tradition' is normally located in higher, more exclusive places in English

culture, such as Oxford and one of its universities. *That* great tradition has had Michael Oakeshott and 'the canon' to defend it for decades. *That* great tradition has found expression in voices like those quoted by Chris Woodhead, for example DH Lawrence at his reactionary worst. The Chief Inspector was pleased to quote him. 'What is the point,' asked Lawrence, 'of dragging a lad who has no capacity for academic learning or understanding through the processes of education?'

For David Blunkett, on the other hand, only the best in education is good enough. But for whom? Everyone. 'We want opportunity for all our people': education is "the great liberator". 'Everyone' – the many not the few – is the most radically transforming of all words: *all* for each. 'Everyone', 'all our people', has run through the Secretary of State's speeches since 1997.

New Labour's Learning and Skills agenda, and the Bill as it becomes an Act, may be seen as one stage in the cultural transformation which *The Learning Age* (1998) saw as necessary, in order to bring about lifelong learning for everyone in Britain. It may already be important to recall, in case it recedes, the *scale* of the transformation New Labour wanted to achieve in all-age education and training during the three years following the Spring of 1997. And to recall the agreement, or at least the absence of open opposition, which, for a time, surrounded the lifelong learning project. Hopes far wider than education and training were pinned to lifelong learning. No less than a cultural revolution was proposed, for example in the work of the National Advisory Group on Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (NAGCELL).

Such ambition broke through into government documents. It is still there, to the extent that *inclusion* remains more than a moral category. Inclusion as moralisation says: 'behave like us, do what we think you should do, and we'll include you'. But to the extent that *everyone* remains the intended beneficiary of a radically *different* set of arrangements for lifelong learning, the question of agency – or the question 'how?' – jumps out. What answers might Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise have to such a question? What are the relevant characteristics of such enterprises? Conversely, what value might be added to Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise by the new arrangements for Learning and Skills?

And could an idea of 'organic learning', as a way of conceiving the goal, help?

Top down, from the Learning and Skills Council?

The new 'arrangements' for post-16 learning, as *Learning to Succeed* (1999) called them, using a more active word than 'structures', are not in place yet. We are in a year of transition which will end in April 2001.

Arrangements hardened into structures in the *Prospectus* for the Learning and Skills Bill and on the face of the Bill itself, as it became an Act. As they did, they teetered on the edge of being dreadful, in undemocratic ways: top-down and centralised. But – almost because of that – they are still available for – indeed they cry out for – development in hopeful ways. Such ways could be entirely consonant with Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise.

- The new Learning and Skills Council, with its 47 local Councils seen as arms of a single body, *will be* a massive central 'purchaser'. A creature of statute, election will have no more place in composing it – in selecting its Chair, its Boards, its Advisory Committees for Youth and for Adult Learning – than was the case with Training and Enterprise Councils. Representation, except of 'business' (40%), will have to be sought, even fought for, as the TUC discreetly did, on behalf of Trade Union representation on TECs. The LSC will have £6 billion to spend, on 5 million or more learners. Will it be a giant, centralised putting-out agency, buying outputs in the 'learning market', forcing down prices from de-skilled suppliers? Or could it be a stimulus to genuinely new forms for 'owning' a learning age?
- 'Providers' *will be* scattered less coherently than before across categories: collegiate/FE, work-based/private', and 'new entrants' to the 'learning market'. In that sense, providers will be more disaggregated, less associated than before. This will be so unless they can group Regionally, or in an Association of Colleges or a Further Education Development Agency which acquires sufficient vision to unite more than former FE. Further Education, as a coherent sector, is well on the way to disappearing. (This could be a great spur to Comprehensive post-school learning, free from Higher and Lower, as well as to CMEs as 'new suppliers'.)
- Local (previously Lifelong) Learning Partnerships *will be* somewhat form-less, unincorporated, 'partnerships', for assembling disparate providers, 'the voluntary sector', and the voice of learners. In that sense, LLPs could be marginalised, away from the central place they were to occupy until *Learning to Succeed*. This will be so unless they can take advantage of their more ambivalent place. LLPs could then use the margins for self-activity, and for self-organisation among those who implement and learn: among those, in other

words, who learn and teach as well as among those who structure, target and plan.

- Individual learners' capacity to 'drive the system' *will be* limited to weak, market, or 'consumer' (rather than membership) modes. This will be so, unless new forms of empowerment make for 'LearningDirect', in more profound ways than information supplied at the end of a terminal or telephone. Stronger market modes might help, such as funding all post compulsory learning directly through an extended, universal system of Individual (and more than individual) Learning Accounts. We might then be able to choose whom to hold our Account with. Or the government might specify that such Accounts must be held with co-operative and mutual – or at the very least, democratically controllable – enterprises. This almost happened with Stakeholder Pensions (see the first welfare reform White Paper, drafted by Frank Field).
- Learning Centres *will be*, literally, all over the place: everywhere but also, formally, nowhere. This will be so unless they serve as more than annexes, or sources of funding for 'providers'. There are some signs that advocates of Social Enterprise, within SRB 6 Bids, are simply re-badging existing dominant providers as 'learning centres', in much the same way as those providers re-badged their libraries when it was fashionable so to do. Connecting Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise with the Learning and Skills arrangements can improve on that. There will be many Learning Centres, with and without capital letters. They will include: Ufi Learning Centres, Adult and Community Fund Learning Centres, New Opportunities Fund Learning Centres, HE and FE and School providers' Learning Centres, Business or Company Learning Centres, Library Learning Centres, ICT Learning Centres... and hybrids of each and all of these. As outreach provision they will be one thing, multiplying units, multiplying outcomes, driven by funding mechanisms. As inreach to novel (but old) ways of learning they could be quite another thing. Learning Centres can extend the empire of dominant providers. Or they can de-colonise, in the interests of new forms of 'community', and so of learning. They could become dominant forms themselves, for mutual aid within the Information and Communications Technology revolution. In its best practices, the ICT revolution has itself been a key example of mutuality at work, in software development (Linux) and in the whole form of WWW. The outcome depends on who takes 'ownership' of Learning Centres and on how ordinary and unlike school they become. Such Centres

could start from our own front rooms, where the *technology* will be. Then extend this into new enterprises, new ways of learning and teaching, co-operative and mutual ways, where the *sociability* is. New ways of getting together in order to learn is what learning centres without their capital letters could be, and already are. Public (learning) Houses: front rooms more comfortable and better equipped than any of us can afford individually. Very much what the Club and Institute Union was dominantly promoting a century ago, and are still, perhaps residually, promoting now. The objects of the Union, reading from a 1987 copy of their *Rules and Standing Orders* start with: 'To carry on the business of general advisers, teachers of the doctrine of association for social or ameliorative purpose'. Later: 'to provide education and /or educational facilities to member clubs and the members of such clubs; to provide lectures and schools at branch and national level and to make monetary grants in connection therewith'. What an opportunity for partnership with the Ufi – and in inner cities too!

All this points to that fact that, within the structures set out in the Learning and Skills Act, as those structures take shape after April 2001, co-operation and mutuality will be a necessity. The alternative will be incoherence, or top-down bonapartism with the Secretary of State as Napoleon.

A symptom of the new structures is how many key players have been assigned 'strategic' roles, but have no certain place in the actual governance and management of the new structures. These players include Local Authorities, LEAs, National Training Organisations, Regional Development Agencies, and the University for Industry. To follow up just one of these, how many potential consumers> users> members are clear who are the shareholders, or *members* of the company/ university/corporation/charity/new form' which is the Ufi? In the early *Prospectus* for the Ufi, 'membership' was an encouraging theme. But who for? For learners, businesses, hubs and centres, sectors, regions? For all these, within a multi-stakeholder form – the 'new type of organisation' which the early *Prospectus* announced – private, public and both? How will such membership be expressed in active forms of governance and management, more specific than 'the market' and responsive to 'demand'. How will the 'special relationship' between the Learning and Skills Council and the Ufi, proposed in the LSC *Prospectus*, be articulated, in responsible governance and management terms, rather than in old-fashioned, lobbying terms?

Organic learning: uses and definitions

So far, 'organic' as an adjective, still less the great tradition of *The Learning Age*, does not spring to mind.

The words 'provider' or 'supplier', with reference to education and training, are less than mutual. 'Provision' is not quite how learning happens: 'provisions' do not describe its processes as accurately as the same word describes groceries. The same applies to 'delivery'. And to 'suppliers'. This label has emerged in the recent DfEE lexicon, presumably because it is symmetrical with what everyone wants: 'demand'. The output of learning, as Mick Fletcher has pointed out, is produced by the 'customer', making such a word as customer inappropriate. 'Health has similar characteristics and it is perhaps no accident that fitness clubs are not called fitness shops.'

By its very nature learning is a two-way, or mutual, activity. Mick Fletcher has put forward four general reasons for supposing this:

- ☐ We generally learn from and with others.
- ☐ I cannot buy learning; I can only buy assistance to learn.
- ☐ Knowledge is something that you can give to others without losing any of it yourself.
- ☐ Training is an activity which in many cases can only benefit an individual if it also benefits someone else.

To add the word 'organic' in such a setting needs justification. The word is used here to signal necessary, as well as desirable, ways forward within the new structures: necessary because of what otherwise those structures might turn out to be. And it is used to continue to try to make connections with earlier ways of seeing, earlier ways of acting.

'Organic' is used here as a label for what Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises could do for, or produce from, the new structures: arranging and rearranging them. In Parliamentary debates on the Learning and Skills Bill, the Opposition has cried "top-down", to be answered by the Government saying "No, it's not, it's bottom-up". Neither view will do. Top-down and bottom-up, like 'state-driven' or 'individual-learner driven', are on the same, vertical axis. Top-down and bottom-up are two sides of the same coin. It is the view from *within* that we need, as learners and practitioners. Some results of such a view will be specified later, on pages 25-31, Proposals for Action.

At this point, a notion of 'organic learning' may be helpful for two further reasons:

First, as a label for learning which grows from life, including, of course, from work, rather than being inimical to it.

Organic, in the above sense, points towards learning as growing from many 'ordinary' lives, rather than sprouting as the sport of a few, 'educated' lives which then set 'standards'. There is no reason why 'work-related', 'work-based', 'vocational' as adjectives applied to learning should be seen as *less than* other 'education'. Within the John Ruskin, William Morris, radical critique of capitalist training (by means of dominant forms of state education, known as 'socialisation' by sociologists), *work* and work-pleasure was the source of the cultural revolution they worked for. Much of the Left let go of this, staying within English fastidiousness about 'training' and *de haut en bas* attachment to 'education' as somehow away from and above 'work'.

Organic, in the 'real' sense of being rooted in the realities of life, echoes current preference for whole, or unadulterated, food. This is food un-doctored by experts or by business people who claim to know better than us what is good for us. The Rochdale Pioneers, a large portrait of whom appears in The Dome, were early advocates of such food.

It is the separation of learning from life, even its perceived hostility to many lives, which results in 'failure', or exclusion. Such separated learning is detached 'schooling', in that nineteenth-century sense which lingers on. It was during the nineteenth century that 'education' collapsed into schooling, and thereby became dreadful for many people, or dystopian (see Charles Dickens). At the same time it became utopian for a few people, including statist social re-formers from above, from whose prescriptions the 'New' politics (Right and Left) has been trying to escape. Such social reformers include much of 'old Labour' and much, indeed, of Social Democracy. Education became the answer to all social problems, as viewed from the same perspective. Then education became a self interested profession, employing more and more people, with all that that implies. Apprenticeship slowly died, lasting longest in education, not training, in the ancient universities. The separation of 'training' from education grew greater, along with 'vocational' as adjective (though not 'vocation' as noun) becoming a subtracting, or less-than-something-else word. Should 'work-based', or the 'work-based route' be less than something-else-based learning (cheaper than? less 'liberal' than? for different people than?).

From eight years at Ruskin College, I learned that dominant structures in education and training in Britain may be organic to somebody else's life trajectory. But they are not organic to that of so-called school failures, or early leavers, and not to that of the educationally disadvantaged or excluded. Built-in to the very word 'educated' in Britain, there has been the idea that it is not for everyone, not for the likes of me - almost as if that differentiation (exclusivity) is what 'education', in this country, is. This could help to explain the extraordinary persistence of the statistics on Basic Skills in Britain. It may be that those who lack Basic Skills, and who are talked about by governments in particular tones of voice, are a moral category before they are a technical one. The figures may never change substantially - particularly in England - without a moral, cultural, social set of changes which start much 'higher' than the 'basic'. Such changes

may have to start among those who 'have' something rather than, in the first instance, among those who 'lack' something.

Secondly, 'organic' is a way of re-making the connection with adult education as a democratic social movement: to 'motivation' as, literally, movement, the capacity to move.

*(As in AE Dobbs' pioneer study, *Education and Social Movements* (1919), already cited, and JFC Harrison's *Learning and Living 1790-1960: a study in the history of the English adult education movement* (1961).)*

In this sense, 'organic' is intended to revive Antonio Gramsci, the inter-war Sardinian Marxist's term, 'organic intellectuals'. The term was much favoured by 1970s new, or 'community' co-operators.

In the 'new social movements' of the 1970s - community organisation, the women's movement, ethnic initiatives, worker or producer co-operatives - we meant by our proud interest in re-using the phrase 'organic intellectuals':

- ☐ learning related to a movement or project
- ☐ learning for a *whole* new society or set of social arrangements, *growing* within the old (organic in those two, italicised, senses)
- ☐ learning for sustainable, sometimes alternative, sometimes oppositional, never detached, always social, more than individual, capacity- building
- ☐ democratic control, by the many, to replace oligarchic, business but also professional and managerial, control by the few. This, we thought, was best achieved not all at once, and not through big P Politics and the big S State, but through co-operative and mutual, cultural and social movements. We wanted to work in and through society (streets), rather than to burrow underground or to parachute in from above (even by means of General Election victories, let alone by 'revolution'). The Federation of Worker Writers & Community Publishers was one example.

By thinkers we meant learners, not the learned. Writing in his *Prison Notebooks* in the early 1930s, Gramsci dared to propose that "everyone" is a philosopher'. (When attempting to make a connection between the embryonic Ufi and the University of Oxford, while still a TEC Director and sitting in Learning Link near Oxford Station in early 1998, I was put down by a very new, New Labour Minister of State at the DfEE: "oh, Stephen, you're one of those sixties people who think everyone can do anything".) As thinkers, we proposed - and practised - 'active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, "permanent persuader" '.

The thinking, or intellectual task was that of 'renovating and making "critical" an already existing activity', not 'introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life'.

Gramsci wrote of such thinking, or thoughtful, activity as being that of organic, or sometimes he called them 'new' intellectuals. The word 'new' was as characteristic of the 1920s and 30s, and of the 1970s, as it became of the 1990s. (See *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Q Hoare and G Nowell Smith, London, 1971, pp 10, 331.)

Organic learning: opportunities

There may be fertile soil to grow organic learning now. Phrases which have become familiar surround the new and not so new learning and skills agenda:

'Informal', 'flexible', 'learner-driven', 'for work', 'vocational', 'lifelong', 'accountable', 'when and where you want it', 'learning centre', 'information and communications technology', 'partnership', and 'new entrants'.

Such favoured phrases, in particular 'for the many not the few' and 'for all' everyone – could add up to organic learning in the senses in which I am developing the idea here: as an 'integrated approach'.

Such phrases could compose a more democratic culture of learning, owned metaphorically and perhaps also materially by learners.

- ☐ 'Providers' could develop into enterprises which belong to us rather than to an alienated 'them'. They could be self-governing, working through the details of governance and accountability, beyond thin or market forms thereof. A multi-stakeholding approach, with stakeholders given an actual rather than a metaphorical stake, could make for complex, not simple co-operation. Such an approach would call for new components in the Citizenship curriculum: learning for multi-stakeholding is more complex than learning for 'the vote', 'the party', and so on.
- ☐ Learners could see themselves (ourselves) as members rather than as consumers, in a progression towards mutuality which goes consumer > user > member.
- ☐ Colleges – a good, familiar and radical word crying out for more deliberate usage – suggest Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises. It was the *idea* of an Oxford college as a co-operative community which inspired Grundtvig, the Danish prophet of the Folkhighschool movement in the early nineteenth century. GDH Cole, perhaps surprisingly, was similarly impressed a century later: RH Tawney rather less so. What the distance between the idea and the actuality of a College in Oxford – Bibblio College – did to Jude the Obscure is well known.
- ☐ Learning could be seen as something we arrange for ourselves, without that being seen as 'private' (in the sense of less than 'public', and often 'fee-paying'), or 'informal' (less than 'formal') or 'voluntary' (less than 'statutory').

Such ideals have found practical expression in the tutorial class movement, and in study or reading circles. Study Circles remain strong in Northern Europe. In Leeds there were 35 of them in 1913, with over 600 students. They survived

through to the late-1920s and early 1930s in that city, mainly as Co-operative Society groups. These were groups of anything from 6 to 20 persons meeting weekly under the leadership of a tutor who was unpaid and who was often a student from a tutorial class. JFC Harrison has described how 'Adult Schools, co-operative society guilds, working men's clubs, Labour Leagues and trade union branches were the natural home of these groups'.

The ideals find a modern echo in Member Groups in the Oxford, Swindon and Gloucester Co-operative Society. The aim is to gather a rapidly increasing membership of the Society (encouraged by dividends) into small groups for co-operative and mutual learning, regularly. Would it be wrong to think of such groups as fundable by the Learning and Skills Council? The Adult and Community Learning Fund, a first fruit of *The Learning Age* managed by the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE), funds comparable work for members, Board members, and potential Board members and managers in CRS. CRS stands for Co-operative Retail Services now merging with the Co-operative Wholesale Society to form the largest retail co-operative society in Europe. The CRS learning programme is called 'Getting to Grips'. From this programme will probably come a development project with the Ufi.

But such opportunities could be illusory. The phrases, so familiar to people in education and training since the 1980s – 'informal', 'flexible', 'output-driven', 'learner-driven', 'for work', 'vocational', 'accountable', and so on – could turn out not be democratic but to be dreadful.

So far from leading forward into a usable past, such phrases could describe individualised, cheap, incoherent, centralised, 'mass' (in the worst sense), private, unsupported, just-in-time, episodic, commodified, passive learning. This is the learning which used to be referred to as 'training', in the snobbish sense of that word which English educators favoured, before 'learning' replaced the education/training dichotomy during the early 1990s. This is the learning which 'mechanisms', funding and otherwise, tend to select for growth. There was some of it in the franchising activity formerly encouraged by the FEFC, through Colleges. Such activity was at the opposite end of the spectrum from 'collegiate'.

Which way things go within the Learning and Skills Council regime could depend, in part, on how much Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise we – a real 'we' – can bring to bear on the new arrangements, arranging things for ourselves rather than being structured by them.

Mutuality Works and Oxfordshire

This is the opportunity followed through in a recent Oxfordshire Mutuality Task Force report. *Mutuality Works*, with some reference to the learning and skills agenda, among more expected fields for Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise. There could be fruitful connections between this Report, its possible successors from 'Co-operative Futures' and John Ord's current work for the Oxfordshire Local Education Authority on Learning Centres in libraries, schools and workplaces. As proposed in *Mutuality Works*, Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises are abbreviated in this paper as CMEs, to go with the more familiar acronym: SMEs. The Task Force report also served to move towards closer definition of CMEs.

A Single Regeneration Budget (SRB 6) bid has been submitted to the South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA), arising, in part, from *Mutuality Works*. SEEDA's Skills Plan conveniently uses identical language to that of the University for Industry, or LearnDirect: the language of hubs and centres. The SRB bid is for a Social Enterprise hub in the Region, to which lifelong learning, if we get the thinking right, could contribute and from which lifelong learning could benefit. 'Social Enterprise' is the wider category to which CMEs may be said to belong. 'Social Enterprise' is being advanced most vigorously by Jonathan Bland and Baker Brown Associates, in Social Enterprise London (SEL). SEL is developing a set of learning programmes, up to and including the postgraduate level, and a research network dedicated to Social Enterprise. IPPR has a project in the same field.

A Learning and Skills post may be attached to the Social Enterprise hub in the Thames Valley region. The hub could also have a specialist centre in co-operation and mutuality in Oxfordshire, managed by the Oxfordshire Co-operative Development Agency, working with Co-op Futures. Co-op Futures is the newly-developed federal organisation, across the Oxford, Swindon and Gloucester Co-operative Society area, which is to continue the work of the Mutuality Task Force. Within the SRB bid, a centre for community regeneration is proposed for Reading, and a centre focussing on ethnic minority issues in Slough. In addition, SEEDA is minded to inform its other, industry specific enterprise hubs with a social enterprise content.

Co-op Futures has seconded a post to work with SEEDA on this agenda. All this is one result of their co-operation with the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership, stemming from the Heart of England Training and Enterprise Council.

The SRB bid is being co-ordinated by a Board managed by the Oxfordshire Co-operative Development Agency, led by Jon Cross. Taken in conjunction with initiatives underway in Social Enterprise London and with the Co-operative Commission nationally, there could be distinctive, CME outcomes, furthering an inclusive learning age. An outcome of these could be to make complicated Co-operative Support Agency and United Kingdom Co-operative Council and Co-operative Union Regional and sub-Regional networks more widely known not only to each other but also *outside* the Co-operative Movement. This will be the way to breathe new life into old networks. These networks have been through a

phase of either being enmeshed with the internal politics of Retail Co-operative Societies or becoming opportunists in the bid culture, going for work with little or no connection with co-operation and mutuality. CMEs need the *Learning Age* as much as the *Learning Age* needs CMEs.

Social Enterprise London has formed a Learning Partnership to promote research and development on social enterprise, particularly in order that the London Development Agency and the Small Business Service in London may have expert business advisers in this field. A postgraduate learning programme is being developed with the University of East London, alongside an emergent degree programme in UEL which will be able to be accessed through the Co-operative College's Accelerated Access Programme, funded by the FEFC/LSC. Social Enterprise London is also developing web-based learning materials on 'Understanding Social Enterprise', backed by the Department of Trade and Industry and the British Bankers Association. This will improve the understanding of Social Enterprise by banks and key people within the Small Business Service franchise network. Such work-in-progress addresses the question: what are the similarities and what are the differences between 'social' and other types of enterprise?

The Co-operative Commission took evidence during the year. At first its focus was to be on Retail Societies only. At an early meeting this was extended more widely. It will report in early 2001, including to Co-operative Congress in May 2001. Results in the learning and skills area, if any, will depend on what inputs are made to the Commission, on co-operation and mutuality for lifelong learning, alongside expected inputs on CMEs in other fields. Retail co-ops, producer co-ops, housing co-ops, leisure co-ops, care co-ops . . . yes: what about co-ops and mutuals for learning and skills?

The think tank Demos has theorised Trade Unions as mutuals, in part for learning and skills ('employee mutuals'), thus returning Unions to an earlier set of functions; UNISON has developed over ten years as a provider of more-than-trade-union education for its members (the Unison Open College); the TUC has been active on the skills agenda, working through Training and Enterprise Councils (Bargaining for Skills); the Trades Union Learning Fund has generated a range of dynamic projects. With John Monks in the Chair of the Co-operative Commission, there is a clear opening for further developments, in and beyond the retail co-operative movement. A rich inheritance of internal member education in the retail co-operative movement could be turned outwards, so that learning becomes one of the products which Societies offer to members and potential members. There is no reason why public funding should not be available from the Learning and Skills Council, perhaps through the Co-operative College which is already funded, for its Accelerated Access Programme, by the FEFC. Local Learning and Skills Councils have the power to direct and to vary a proportion of national funding in response to local needs. Such needs could as well be articulated by a Co-operative Society as by any other business or component of the voluntary sector. Co-operative Societies are both and neither. Their interest as CMEs lies precisely in the fact that they inhabit new/old territory, neither public nor private, business nor voluntary.

Proposals for Action

- What do Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises need to do in order to position themselves to be able to gain from and contribute to the new Learning and Skills agenda?
- What enabling steps could be taken from the Learning and Skills side, including by the Learning and Skills Council?
- What could CMEs contribute to the Learning and Skills Act, as it becomes operational during Winter 2000-Spring 2001?

The questions are large. Answers offered here will be more modest. Running through them all is the conclusion that:

Initiatives will need to be taken by CMEs as well as by policy makers and government. In market terminology, the demand side – stemming from a renewed co-operative and mutual impulse – will be a precondition of improved supply from policy makers and from government of opportunities for lifelong learning and for co-operative and mutual enterprise.

For action by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and by CMEs.

- ☐ David Blunkett's commitment
 - (a) to British History within the pre-16 curriculum and
 - (b) to Learning for Citizenship and
 - (c) to Key Skills for team work and for community capacity building, should include specific focus on the 'great tradition' named in *The Learning Age*.
- ☐ To build on and to renew this tradition, new suppliers in the learning market, learning materials, work experience, and teacher placements should be developed by and commissioned from CMEs. Initiatives need to be taken by and on behalf of co-operative and mutual enterprise and by CMEs. For example, bids for developmental projects to: European Union Social Economy and related funds; Local Learning and Skills Councils and Regional Development Agencies; Single Regeneration Bid 6 and 7 consortia; the Trades Union Learning Fund; the Adult and Community Learning Fund; the Community Champions Fund. Accurate and timely environmental scanning is still at a premium amongst CMEs and their support agencies.

For Action by Government, Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), and by CMEs

- ☐ Within the '40% business' category, or in a category on its own, representation on the national Learning and Skills

Council and on the Local Councils should be sought from Chief Officers of CMEs. To have CMEs represented on all appointed government and arms-length government bodies should be as normal as having 'business' representation, 'the voluntary sector', and so on. CMEs need to be more proactive in this matter than they were with reference to Training and Enterprise Councils (with the exception of the TUC which worked very successfully with TECs and LECs).

- Similar representation should be sought on the Youth and on the Adult Education Advisory Committees of the Learning and Skills Council. For example, the Woodcraft Folk and the Scottish Co-operative Education Centre's programme for young co-operators, for Youth; and Member Education and Training Officers of CMEs, for Adults.
- CME representation should not be subsumed under any other category, viz, the voluntary sector, or Trades Unions, consonant though those are with Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise.

For Action by the Learning and Skills Council

- The Learning and Skills Council, in its research and development role, should commission, directly or through an agency such as the Further Education Development Agency or through NIACE, projects which research and develop the value added by detailed *forms* of governance and management to capacity building, learning capability, and learners' potential.

These projects should include :

- a curriculum development project on *Learning for Co-operation and Mutuality*. (This project would build on the Schools work done by the annual Co-operative Learning Conference of the Co-operative Education and Learning Network, extending such work Post-16).
- a governance and management project on *Ownership and Learning*. This project would build on the connections established (assumed?) by the FEFC Inspectorate, between 'cross college elements' in Inspection and learners' experience/learning outcomes.

For Action by the DfEE, and DTI, and by Local Learning Partnerships, Small Business Service Franchisees, Education Business Partnerships SRB consortia, and Regional Development Agencies.

- ☐ Among Local Learning Partnerships, Small Business Service Franchisees and Education Business Partnerships, the *Business Co-op* form, as a corporate form (i.e. with the stakeholders/partners as full members of Partnerships constituted as multi-stakeholder CMEs, guided, for instance, by ICOM rules), should be piloted and evaluated in selected Regions and sub-Regions. Such initiatives, concerning corporate form, governance and detailed accountability, clearly need to come from the Partnerships themselves in the first instance. Such initiatives centre on what *membership* means.
- ☐ Similarly evaluated experiments should be encouraged among successful Single Regeneration Budget 6 and 7 bids, and introduced as a criterion for some bids under SRB 7.

For Action by Local Learning Partnerships and by planners and participants in Partnerships of all kinds in the lifelong learning field

LLPs will become sites for articulating (joining and giving voice to) providers/suppliers. They are also intended to articulate the voluntary sector, with reference to lifelong learning. Local Learning Partnerships also have a role in aggregating the voices of learners.

The ambitious (or marginal?) role for LLPs can be developed with specific reference to CME forms. The advantage such forms have is that they do not easily fit into existing categories, voluntary or statutory, private or public. CMEs were invented to move beyond such categories, in ways which could be convergent with current governmental impulses.

- ☐ Protocols for Partnership Agreements with specific reference to the learning field should be drawn up which draw on the Co-operative and Mutual inheritance. This applies specifically to Local Learning Partnerships.

The relevance of CME experience in the setting of Partnerships is that:

- it addresses the problem of smaller partners being 'partnerhipped' out by cartels of dominant providers
- it addresses the problem of separating out voice (having an equal voice) from size of share

- it foregrounds the relationship between investment (qualitative as well as quantitative) and dividend to partners
 - it searches for forms of mutual advantage, material win-win, rather than winners taking all – partnership as co-operation rather than take-over by another name
 - it anticipates professional, managerial and expert dominance and then works against the grain of divisions of labour as divisions of humans based upon such dominance
 - it is familiar with rules, agreements, constitutions and articles of association which serve as tools towards the above, and has these ready to be taken down off the shelf.
- Learners should be encouraged, through a multi-stakeholder approach, towards a membership role in Local Learning Partnerships, alongside 'providers' or 'suppliers', in the same way that customers are in Retail Co-ops, investors are in Friendly Societies, borrowers in Building Societies, and so on. If LLPs are to become real voices for learners, detailed work needs to be done on how learners become integral to their forms of governance and accountability. In what sense might learners become members of LLPs? (The same question applies to the UFL.)

For Action by Best Value and Value for Money Auditors

- Ownership and specific forms of multi-stakeholder accountability and control should be an added element in Best Value Auditing (and Value for Money audits) by and on behalf of Local Authorities and other public bodies

For Action by and on behalf of Learning Centres

The potential of Learning Centres will be wasted if they are seen as rooms full of machines; as annexes to existing providers (re-badging libraries, multiplying funding units, lowering costs through mechanisation); or as new names for existing providers (whether FE Colleges, Higher Education Institutions, or Adult and Community Education provision). Calling what already exists a Learning Centre, and adding more Information and Communications Technology, may increase the turnover of dominant suppliers. But it may not produce step changes in learning of the kind called for in *The Learning Age* and now, urgently, in Basic Skills.

The earliest Co-op stores were learning centres, with meeting rooms and libraries attached to shops. This is the way to see learning centres, as sets of social relationships, rather than as rows of computer terminals, or as rooms in providers'

buildings. Terminals will exist at home. Most of the necessary ICT will exist in most people's homes, as common as television (and more common than telephones). At our local Learning Centre, or learning mutual, it will be human relations that we need; mentoring, advice, experience and support rather than formal instruction; fellow travellers as well as teachers. Learning will be ordinary, part of life, organic in that sense.

- ☐ Learning Centres should be piloted and evaluated which assume ICT, as standard as pens and paper, but which emphasise social relations in and around the Centre, experimenting with co-operative and mutual forms of ownership and management. A number of Learning Centres should be piloted as specifically co-operative and mutual ways of getting together in order to learn. Such Centres will be strengthened by not being classified into compulsory and post-compulsory age groups. PAT 2 (on Skills) recommended 'neighbourhood learning centres, which local people should have a role in managing where possible. DfEE should publish a plan setting out an approach to the development of such centres'. Such Centres could develop as Learning Co-ops.

The current government projects into which such pilots fit include: volunteering, community capacity building, community champions, and action for neighbourhood renewal. CMEs need to secure excellent briefing on all of these.

For Action by the Ufi, and by CMEs.

LearnDirect, or the University for Industry, already has as one of its priorities the retail sector. This is a clear opportunity for partnership, for example with the new CWS, the largest retail co-operative society in Europe, and the Co-operative College, with specific reference to CMEs for learning. Such a partnership could extend to the use of inner city Club and Institute Union plant and social capital for purposes to which it has been built up for more than a century.

Learning Directly cuts out middlemen. This has always been a co-operative aim. LearnDirect (as in SupportersDirect, HealthDirect, and so on) means cutting out stakeholders whose only stake is bureaucratic or financial.

- ☐ A Ufi sectoral hub should be developed with specific reference to Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise.

For Action by CMEs

- ☐ CMEs should develop learning services of all kinds for members and potential members. These will be external to the movement as well as internal. They should seek funding from the Learning and Skills Council, alongside other public

funding, for such services, through the Co-operative College where appropriate. The College was designated for FEFC funding and will be so for LSC funding. The learning services developed by CMEs should include learning materials on Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise, including on line materials with the University for Industry.

- CME financial services products should be developed for learning and for learners alongside already-existing CME financial services products (for credit, borrowing, saving, and so on.) Such services should include: financial services for saving, borrowing and receiving third party credit for learning (Individual Learning Accounts). Unlike the FEFC, the LSC has the capacity to fund individuals. This makes space for Individual Learning Accounts to become more central to the funding of learning in the future (including HE) than the already designed first 1 million such ILAs necessarily imply. The Co-operative Family, led by the CWS/CRS, the Co-operative Insurance Society, and the Co-operative Bank are perfectly based to develop such Accounts. Ensure, and insure, your children's life chances, through lifelong learning, at the Co-op. Save as you spend or, as the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society once put it, 'eat your way into the future'.
- The Co-operative and Mutual movement, as part of its community and neighbourhood self-management commitment, should explore ways of relating to schools as all-age, all-hours learning centres. Good work was done by the retail co-operative movement under the Schools Curriculum Industry Partnership (SCIP). There is an annual conference at the Co-operative College on Co-operative Learning in Schools. This conference came out of the SCIP work. In the new climate for 'compulsory' and 'post compulsory' learning, and the links between the two, SCIP connections could be revived, working through Education Business Partnerships. Current government commitment to Breakfast Clubs, After School Clubs, and Summer Schools provides opportunities for CMEs.
- CMEs should consider what their inheritance with regard to governance and the details of *organisational form*, may have to offer to dominant 'suppliers' in education and training. There are already large scale training providers (such as the Wise Group) working in the training field, as Social Enterprises. Co-op Net is actively exchanging ideas on Learning Co-ops, while also debating new moves to turn privatised utilities, such as Yorkshire Water, into Registered Community Asset Mutuals. Higher Education Institutions;

Further Education Colleges; Schools; Staff who work for those 'suppliers' with terms and conditions which are not getting easier; and the Trade Unions and Associations which represent staff, may be ready to consider what Co-operatives and Mutuals have to offer as ways of providing dynamic learning environments within and beyond existing dominant institutions. Consider what 'Colleges', at best, represent, as multi-stakeholder enterprises which include learners as stakeholders. Consider the power of the ideology (if not the practice) of ancient university colleges, as 'membership organisations'. (RH Tawney once wrote a piece on a National Fellowship of All Souls.) Consider the observation of one expert in FE on an early draft of this Section: 'lots of colleges began around mutual bodies that were first municipalised and then incorporated and look now to be nationalised'. How many 'suppliers' were, in some sense 'our' organisations, and are looking for ways of becoming so again?

- CMEs should examine DfEE Consultative Papers as they focus on arrangements for after April 2001. They offer information on opportunities for 'new suppliers' in the learning market. Learning may be a product which CMEs wish to major on in the twenty-first century. The Co-operative Movement, and the CIU Club movement, for example, did in the nineteenth century, from their own resources. Adult Learning was an integral part of the dynamic growth of Credit Unions in Ireland from the 1950s onwards. New forms and conditions for learning in the twenty-first century may provide a significant area for marketing the co-operative advantage. (See, in particular, DfEE, *The Learning and Skills Council: Funding Flows and Business Processes*, May 2000 Paras 5.20, 5.26, 5.38. And DfEE *Raising Standards in Post-16 Learning: Consultation Document – Learning to Succeed*, Paras 28–31 of Chapter 3, where the issues for new suppliers are set out.)

Conclusion

In the arrangements for 'post-compulsory' education and training (PCET) which will follow the Learning and Skills Act from April 2001 (omitting HE, for the time-being), a single funding council, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will dominate.

The new system will need help from CMEs in general ways as well as in detailed ways, in ways of seeing as well as in ways of acting. The very idea that pre-16 learning is 'compulsory' – conscription of childhood and youth by the state – and that post-16 learning is either 'adult education' and voluntary, or job-related training, compulsory and 'free', flies in the face of David Blunkett's great tradition. The 'voluntary', which is not the same to CMEs as the 'private', continues to make significant contributions to pre-16 learning. CMEs can tack into the 'private' education wind, without capsizing into elitism and privilege. Sails can be set on new forms of mutual/private, mutual/public initiatives and forms.

Voluntary social movements were the matrix for all-age education and training in Britain – including 'public' education – long before the State became a significant provider. They are the most powerful source of motivation to learn that exists: motivation, quite literally, as movement. Historically, movements have motivated less privileged people to learn more powerfully than any other force. Such motivation is still powerful. It is evident among faith communities in Britain today.

Movements motivate: that is what they are, literally, motivators. Every Co-operative Society, every Trade Union, and many Clubs and Friendly Societies, inherits a fine educational tradition. Mostly used internally nowadays, with the help of the Co-operative College and public funding through the Learning and Skills Council, the great tradition can turn outwards again. It will make the sum which concludes all the Sections of this development paper:

***The new Learning and Skills agenda +
Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise =
ORGANIC LEARNING***

Biographical Notes:

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Cover Picture: From another era - 'Sisterfix' women's motor repair collective (Wandsworth Photography Co-operative)

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